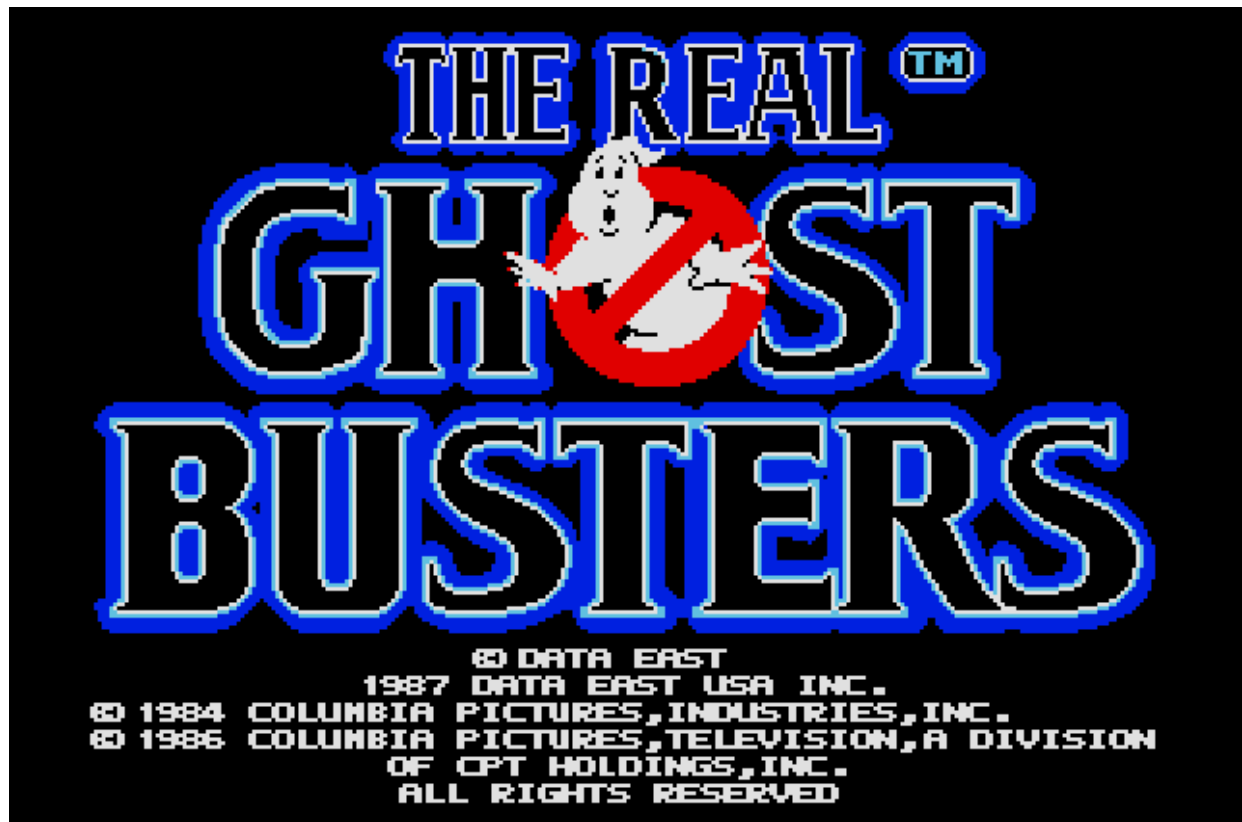


I'm afraid of no lawyers

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

"If there's something weird in your neighbourhood, if there's something strange and it don't look good" your Amiga may well have been possessed by Activision's gaming adaptation of The Real Ghostbusters cartoon.



It's a one or two-player skewed overhead view action shooter sculpted from the same mould as titles such as Ikari Warriors and Commando. Published for all the popular 8-bit and 16-bit home micros in 1988, its roots can be traced back a year prior; to Data East's 1987 coin-op original. Only that was a *three-player* cabinet, and sadly for Ghostbusters fans, one that barely registered on the PKT meter.

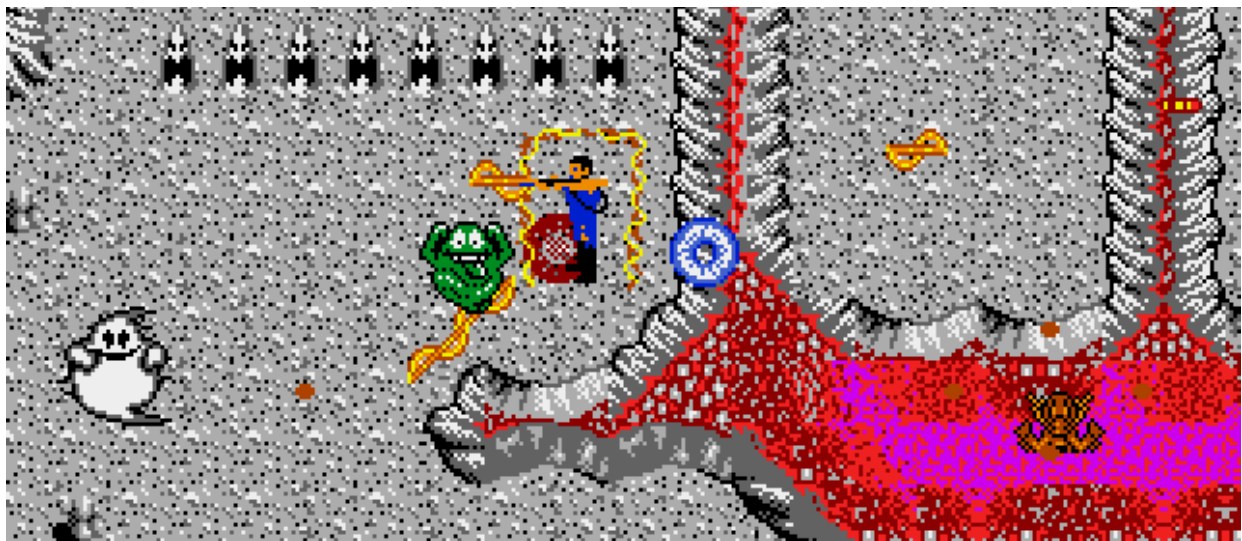
Little wonder then that the diluted version we experienced in our bedrooms fared no better. It's a terrible translation of uninspiring, irrelevant source material. An ectoplasm pie in the face for the much-revered franchise many of us worshipped alternately alongside He-Man, ThunderCats, Transformers, TMNT and a medley of other '80s classics. Like Care Bears!!! ...Just me then?

It's dark, twisted, too mature for our then impressionable little minds and jam-packed with clever pop culture

references. Many of which would have sailed clear over our heads at the time. The gang pick up where their movie counterparts bowed out, dovetailing the two mediums seamlessly, as well as propelling the legacy. In a moment of meta-fictional genius they even attend a preview of the Ghostbusters movie; a biopic based on their own lives, played by Hollywood actors. They were the 'Real' Ghostbusters on a number of levels.

Our Amiga iteration - a port of the Atari ST release - looks like it was cobbled together using AMOS as a school kid's computer science project. Ghoulish adversaries and the protagonists themselves jerk about the environment via sometimes no more than a couple of frames of animation. Others glide across the screen without moving a muscle.

Colours have seemingly been chosen at random, assaulting the senses like a garishly loving homage to the Speccy's attribution clash legacy. Collision detection is equally shambolic, while the gameplay would bore the pants off a pressed dandelion collector.



RGB - running with the colour theme - doesn't really have a plot to speak of, though the premise shares the structural

bare bones of the cartoon or movie; ghosts are running amok in Manhattan and you've been drafted in to quash the threat. Two of you anyway. 50% of the team were too busy shepherding between assignments at the time. And you thought bustin' ghosts wouldn't foster any transferable skills!

To achieve this you incapacitate monsters with your gun (turning them into ghosts), and then incarcerate them in your backpack via a blast from the photon beam. Ordinary ammo is limitless, while laser charge has to be conserved and restored with top-ups.



Foes can be dispatched with either weapon, though you can only accrue extra lives by stashing away tortured souls for safekeeping. Tucked into your backpack they can then be transferred to the ghost bank located in the basement of the old fire station at the end of each level. 50 ghosts deposited (as opposed to 100 in the coin-op) equates to a 1up.



Escalating the challenge posed by staying alive faced with an onslaught of soul-sucking, demonic, otherworldly critters, you must complete levels within a fixed time limit.

Bonuses are accumulated by destroying obstacles or disposing of baddies. These incorporate extra proton beam and gunshot potency, an aura shield and a circulating Slimer defence system. Levitating and disembodied, he whizzes round your head like a mushy pea-dipped tennis ball orbiting the pole of a swing set.



Each of the 10 levels (8 in the arcade version) ends in a guardian skirmish. If you emerge the victor you're rewarded with a key, allowing you to progress to the next level.

Perhaps an allusion to the key master plot point from the movie, although this aspect of the game's mechanics is never expanded upon.



What's more interesting is the often glossed over plagiaristic origins of the Ghostbusters franchise we all know and love. Nine years before the original movie hit the theatres, 'The Ghost Busters' - created by Marc Richards and produced by Filmation - existed as a slapstick TV sitcom aimed at kids. It ran for one series spanning fifteen episodes, starring a team of incompetent spiritual investigators, one of which was a gorilla.

In an interview with R.J. Carter in October 2007 founder of animation studio Filmation, Lou Scheimer, made clear his feelings on the matter...

"Well, I think they ripped us off. Fact is, when I first heard of it -- I read it in the trades, I can't remember which trade it was -- I said, "That's ridiculous. That's our show. That's our premise, that's our concept.

We got in touch with Columbia, and I had our attorneys call them. We met with them, and they said, "Well, this

was an animated show on Saturday morning," and I said, "Huh-uh." He said, "What do you mean, 'huh-huh'?" And I said, "Live!" And he said, "Uh-oh. We've got a problem."

Concerning the gorilla, adding insult to injury, bizarrely Filmation suffered somewhat of a backlash through no fault of their own...

"You know, the sadness was, we had the gorilla as part of our original show. They put a black man in the team, and I got a phone call from a nice man -- I can't remember where it was -- and he was horrified that we had taken the Columbia picture and turned the African-American into an ape. And I tried to explain, "No, you don't understand, that was in our original picture." It was sad. I couldn't convince that guy that we hadn't somehow done something terrible."

Eventually Columbia Pictures - who produced the 1984 movie starring Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd, Harold Ramis and Ernie Hudson - conceded to play fair, thus officially licensing use of the title. However, reneged on the profit-sharing deal through the exploitation of dubious creative accounting schemes.

Lou continued...

"It was weird. We did the live series in 1975, and the animated series was in the 80s. What happened was, we made a deal with Columbia to give them the rights to do the picture, and we got \$500,000 for the use, and I made a dumb move. Oh, and we got 1% of the profit from the pictures. It was amazing. I think they spent something like \$65 million, and they grossed something like \$150 million, and they never had any profits. That's when I was exposed to the Hollywood accounting practices. (They weren't practices -- they were well *practiced*.) And I

didn't make a deal with them that excluded the animation. I never thought of it."



In 1986 the seminal 1975 TV show was reworked into an animated cartoon to capitalise on Ghostbusters fever. It ran for 65 daily episodes aired between September and December, and was known for its catchphrase: "Let's go, Ghost Busters!" For the VHS release it was re-dubbed 'Fimation's Ghostbusters' in a hopeless attempt to stop confusing the public.

Prior to this Columbia backed out of a proposed deal to collaborate with Fimation in producing an animated spin-off of Ivan Reitman's Ghostbusters movie. Hence they fell back on their own wholly-owned IP.

Nevertheless, Columbia decided to forge ahead with their own project, instead partnering with DiC Enterprises and Coca-Cola Telecommunications. The so-called 'Real' Ghostbusters first aired in 1986 alongside Fimation's offering. Two years later it was to be rebranded 'Slimer!' and

the Real Ghostbusters', further distinguishing it from the competition.

Meanwhile, on the gaming front, the route to release was no less convoluted. Data East's Real Ghostbusters arcade game turned out to be a tweaked rendition of the Japanese coin-op, Meikyu Hunter G with the addition of a third player option.



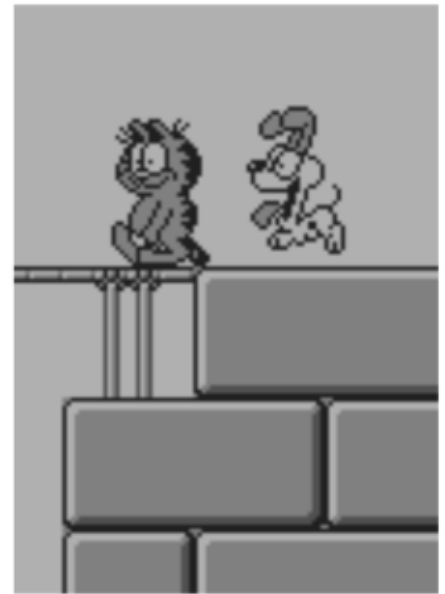
You can choose to play as Egon, Ray, or Peter, but oddly not Winston. Cue accusations of racism, mirroring Ernie's real-world experience. He had a good case, although it wasn't one he pushed himself.

Aesthetically Meikyu Hunter G was revamped to include Ghostbusters related paraphernalia, while Ray Parker

Jr.'s theme song supplanted the original soundtrack. This would explain why the port exhibits only a superficial relationship to the cartoon series.

Retooling existing game engines to fit later acquired licenses seems to have been a running theme for Ghostbusters titles. Deja vu struck in 1993 with the release of Kemco's multi-region Real Ghostbusters cartridge for the Game Boy. Activision took care of the publishing duties in North America, while Kemco themselves (aka Kotobuki Systems) did the honours in Japan and Europe.

In Europe, it was known as Garfield Labyrinth and featured the Monday hating moggy as the protagonist, in case that wasn't obvious. In Japan, he was sidelined by Mickey Mouse starring in his fourth gaming venture in the Crazy Castle series, subtitled Maho no Labyrinth.



In each case, your objective is to escape from a dungeon you've accidentally slipped into. All versions are close to identical save for the main sprite, weapons and branding. Stranger still - whatever it's called - is an unauthorised clone of Traveling Bits' P. P. Hammer and his Pneumatic Weapon; a puzzley platformer released for the Amiga and C64 in 1991.

Coder, Gunnar Lieder, confirmed the absence of any sanctioned crossover via Twitter in 2015...

Replying to @BenPaddon

"There is no link. These game(s) are a complete ripoff. We had never any relationship or even a contact to Kemko."

In the Ghostbusters variant, Peter Venkman ambles about blowing up ghosts with bombs and breaking up concrete blocks with a proton gun. Just like in the movie and cartoon then!



In the Garfield and Mickey renditions, our proton gun is swapped for a pneumatic drill because that's what showed up on the photocopier when Kemco stuck PP Hammer under the lid. Neither character was ever really associated with weaponry.





As for the Amiga's brush with game recycling, RGB wraps up with an external shot of the Ghosthouse former fire station. Animated ghouls flee out through the entrance as we're congratulated for a job well done and we make our getaway in the Ectomobile. Did someone forget to pay the electricity bill and render the Ecto-Containment System out of action?



If you've got a ghost problem, "Who ya gonna call?" Rentakill might be a safer bet! This revenant slaying quartet are clearly a bit rusty.



Judging by the hubbub that erupted over Columbia's alleged IP pilfering, you may be surprised to discover that the plot of Disney's 1937 animation, Lonesome Ghosts and the Spook Busters comedy movie released in 1946 shares a lot in common with Filmmation's spirited output. In the latter, the premise revolves around a group of former students who are recruited to exorcise a haunted mansion. One of them - the dropout - gets entangled in an experiment to transplant part of his brain into a gorilla.

Disney's interpretation of the same territory concerns the escapades of Mickey, Donald and Goofy, known collectively as the Ajax Ghost Exterminators. Recruited by phone to evict a troupe of spectres from a possessed, derelict house, the trio are caught up in a series of pranks orchestrated by the same bored apparitions who made the call in the first place.

With ridding the world of ghosts in an organised fashion, possibly wearing a uniform of some sort, being such a commonplace fictional theme, Columbia might have been better advised to invest some money in a history of film textbook. That half a million dollars would have bought a heck of a lot more Marshmallow Fluff!

In a bizarre twist of coincidence, mingling two already twinned properties, Lorenzo Music lent his voice to the animated portrayals of both Garfield and Peter Venkman. Following Lorenzo's death in 2001 Bill Murray - who played Peter Venkman in both of the proper Ghostbusters movies - became the voice of CGI Garfield.

What all this proves is that every article has to end at some point, and most finish with the last word. Unless there's an encore. There *isn't* in this case.